

## NEWS RELEASE

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CONTACT: Andrea Summers, Community Relations Officer -- 302-744-2743

## **Highway Safety Officials Alarmed About Traffic Deaths on the Rise as they Prepare to Launch Holiday Traffic Safety Campaign**

**Dover** – An average of two people each week have died in traffic crashes on First State roadways in the last two and half months. It's an alarming trend that Office of Highway Safety (OHS) officials fear could get worse as we head into the busiest travel season of the year.

"We're extremely concerned that this could be a recipe for disaster," said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Delaware Office of Highway Safety. "More people will be on the roads for family gatherings, holiday shopping, and parties. There is no doubt that around the holidays traffic crashes go up, particularly those involving alcohol, and we want the public to know now that their lives could be at risk if they don't drive with safety in mind."

What are the Office of Highway Safety's top concerns? Fatal crashes that involve alcohol, speeding, and motorcycles.

Of the 27 people killed in just the last two months, at least 10 or 37% of the deaths were alcohol-related, including the high profile crash at the end of October which killed four young men. Additionally, the percentage of alcohol-related deaths that have occurred since January 1<sup>st</sup> has risen by 3% over this time last year. Since the start of 2007, 43% (or 46) of the state's 106 traffic deaths have been alcohol-related.

Speeding and alcohol are often found in combination when fatal crashes occur. While aggressive driving as a whole has been a factor in 64% of the 94 fatal crashes that have occurred since January 1<sup>st</sup>, speeding is the top single aggressive driving behavior in fatal crashes, and is listed as a factor in more than a quarter (28%) of them.

Motorcycle fatalities have also climbed in the last few months. Five motorcycle operators have been killed in crashes since September 1<sup>st</sup>. In some cases speeding on the part of the cyclist was a factor while in others, the driver of the other vehicle turned into the cycle operators path leaving them with nowhere to go.

To try and stem the tide of traffic fatalities as the holiday season approaches, the Office of Highway Safety is implementing a comprehensive enforcement and awareness plan through its tenth annual Safe Family Holiday Campaign. The campaign, which runs from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day, is aimed at stopping impaired and other dangerous drivers.

OHS officials are coordinating an intensive DUI enforcement plan which will include a minimum of 26 sobriety checkpoints and 342 additional DUI saturation patrols. Some of the checkpoints will be dedicated to the memory of those killed in impaired driving crashes. Paid media in the form of billboard, radio, television, internet, transit, indoor, and print ads will support the enforcement effort.

Several new and expanded awareness activities will also help keep the public informed about the dangers of impaired and aggressive driving. Delaware's law enforcement and corporate communities will stay informed about the status of holiday highway safety activities through weekly bulletins distributed by OHS.

There will be more opportunities for Delaware residents and employees to experience a Safe Family Holiday tradition - the OHS "Mocktail" party. "Mocktails" are non-alcoholic cocktail parties, where safety information, responsible party hosting tips, and samples of "smart" party foods will be provided. Nine mocktail events, six more than usual, are currently scheduled at locations statewide including hospitals, Boscov's stores, and select corporations.

Additionally, there will be a DUI Victim's Tree in all four DMV locations statewide. Lowe's of Wilmington donated an artificial tree this year to support this activity and it will be placed in the lobby of the New Castle DMV. The DUI Victim's Tree memorializes alcohol-related deaths and injuries during the campaign period by placing colored light bulbs on the tree to represent each victim.

Finally, OHS will roll out its partnership with the HERO campaign for Designated Drivers. Bars and restaurants throughout the state will be provided with display materials and a plan for promoting designated drivers within their business. Designated Driver pledge cards will be distributed at sobriety checkpoints, college football games and through corporate outreach.

The following is a list of activities that the Delaware Office of Highway Safety has planned for its tenth annual Safe Family Holiday campaign.

- **DUI Checkpoints** – weekly November 23 – Jan. 1
- **DUI Saturation patrols** – December 1 – 31, as part of the national "Drunk Driving. Over the Limit Under Arrest." National mobilization.
- **Christmas Tree Tag Distribution** - OHS will distribute tags with a "don't drink and drive" message on them to local Christmas tree farmers during the first week in December.
- **Mocktail Parties** – OHS will hold nine non-alcoholic cocktail or "mocktail" parties this year.
- **DUI Victim's Tree** - A highly successful project now in its tenth year is in all four Delaware counties. Each red light on the tree will symbolize an alcohol-related death, and each green bulb an alcohol-related injury in Delaware during the **Safe Family Holiday** campaign. Trees will be located in the lobby of the Dover DMV, the Georgetown DMV, and the Wilmington DMV and the
- **Brochure distribution** – brochures on impaired and aggressive driving are available by calling (302) 744-2740.

For information on these or any of our other Safe Family Holiday campaign efforts contact OHS at (302) 744-2740 or visit our website in the coming weeks for updates at [www.ohs.delaware.gov](http://www.ohs.delaware.gov).